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SUBJECT: EU: BARROSO WITHDRAWS COMMISSION JUST BEFORE VOTE

REF: A. A) USEU TODAY 10/20/04

[B](#). B) USEU TODAY 10/15/04

[C](#). C) USEU TODAY 10/14/04

[D](#). D) BRUSSELS 4578

[E](#). E) USEU TODAY 10/26/04

Classified By: USEU POLOFF TODD HUIZINGA FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Realizing after last-minute consultations that he would not obtain European Parliament (EP) approval, European Commission President-designate Jose Manuel Barroso on October 27 withdrew his Commission one hour before the scheduled vote. He said he would present a new list of Commissioners-designate "soon." Until then, the current Commission, headed by President Romano Prodi, will stay on. While Barroso has lost some prestige and his Commission will get a late start, we do not believe that these events will provoke an institutional crisis in the EU. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND: BUTTIGLIONE'S CONSERVATIVE VIEWS

[2](#). (U) The main obstacle to the Barroso Commission's approval was MEPs' disapproval of Commissioner-designate for Justice, Freedom and Security Rocco Buttiglione's outspoken positions on homosexuality and the family, including his view that homosexuality is a ~~sin~~.<sup>8</sup> The EP Civil Liberties and Justice and Home Affairs Committee rejected Buttiglione's nomination because of fears that Buttiglione would not uphold the principle of non-discrimination toward gays and women. Although various groups in parliament complained of other nominations, Buttiglione's nomination became the *caus* belli that eventually rallied a majority against the Barroso Commission.

BARROSO SEES WRITING ON WALL

[3](#). (C) After Barroso's proposed compromise on October 21 -- which would have dispersed responsibility for non-discrimination among a team of Commissioners -- failed to convince center and left-wing EP leaders (ref D), further consultations brought no significant movement. The centrist liberal faction remained the key swing voting bloc. An EP source told us that, at an October 26 meeting between Barroso and Liberal-Democrat (ALDE) EP Deputies (MEPs), 50 said they would vote against his Commission, 23 said they would vote in favor, and 5 said they would abstain. The results of that meeting tipped the scales against Barroso.

BARROSO'S SURPRISE WITHDRAWAL

[4](#). (U) On October 27, one hour before the vote set for 12:00 noon, Barroso announced to a surprised EP in plenary session that he would withdraw his designated Commission. Saying a vote would not be good for "the European project," Barroso said he would work to come up with a new team within a few weeks. After adjourning temporarily for internal party consultations, the EP reassembled in plenary and accepted Barroso's decision. Both EP President Josep Borrell and the Dutch EU Presidency representative, European Affairs Minister Atzo Nicolai, said the current Prodi Commission would have to stay in office beyond the planned November 1 end of its term until a new Commission had been approved. (Prodi had agreed in the run-up to this vote to continue in office beyond November 1 if necessary.)

What Next?

[5](#). (C) Barroso must now consult closely with member states, and will either re-shuffle portfolios among existing candidates, or ask some or all member states to nominate different commissioners. He will almost certainly try to persuade the Italian government to nominate someone other than Buttiglione. Barroso did not establish any deadline for presenting new proposals, noting only that he would do so "in the next few weeks." The next plenary of Parliament is currently scheduled for November 15-18, but if he proposes new portfolios or presents a new slate of commissioners, it is difficult to imagine the new team would complete the committee hearings process by that time. The next regularly-scheduled plenary is not until December 13-16,

although the Parliament could also be called into special session if needed.

Comment

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16. (C) Withdrawing the Commission may have averted a clear defeat in the vote, and several Parliamentary leaders tried to help Barroso save face by suggesting he would emerge strengthened, not weakened, from this event. The clear loser, however, was the Parliament's largest party grouping, the EPP, which attempted a power play and was outmaneuvered when all other groups rallied against them. A second parliament loser, ironically, could be the liberal democrats, who tipped the balance against this slate. It is difficult to imagine the next team Barroso presents will be as liberal in orientation as the Commission that was just defeated. It is possible back-room discussions at the Rome EU Summit on October 29 could very quickly yield the outlines of a new Commission, but much will depend on PM Berlusconi's willingness to sacrifice Buttiglione. While a big bump in the road for Barroso, we do not believe that these events will provoke an institutional crisis in the EU.

SCHNABEL